

Testimony of Linda Coollick – Department of Education - Technical High School System
303 Gray Fox Lane
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Submitted to the Labor & Public Employees Committee
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Senator Prague, Representative Ryan and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of *Raised Bill No 5285, An Act Concerning State Employees and Violence and Bullying in the Workplace.*

My name is Linda Coollick. I am a CT Certified School Counselor and Department Head with a Post Masters in Counseling from CCSU, a Masters in Educational Administration-Leadership from UCONN and a BA in Psychology from ECSU. My career as a Permanent State Employee began May 17, 1993 as a Counselor in the Department of Corrections. In 1994, I was recruited by the Department of Education Human Resources to join them as a Personnel Officer. I continued as a Permanent State Employee for 15 years until my position and myself were eliminated at the end of 2007/2008 School Year.

2001–2006: Department Head of School Counseling at Vinal Technical High School.

2003-2006: The School environment changed from positive, productive and supportive to bullying, threatening and vindictive. The Vice-Principal was promoted to Principal by her retiring Husband/Superintendent of the CT Technical High School System.

The newly appointed Principal made it clear that she wanted me gone and was willing to do anything to make this happen:

- ✓ DH Evaluation was changed from "SATISFACTORY" to "NEEDS IMPROVEMENT".
- ✓ Adult Ed Supervisor Evaluation was changed from "SATISFACTORY" to "UNSATISFACTORY".
- ✓ AE Evaluation was left unsecured on the fax/copier for 24 hours for faculty/staff to read.
- ✓ DH position was undermined when the Principal communicated directly with the Counselors and left me out of meetings; Placed an incompetent support staff from her office into mine and I was blamed for all incomplete and incorrect work.
- ✓ Teachers/Staff would not talk to me in the hall for fear of being seen and interrogated.
- ✓ Directed me in writing to change a failing grade because she disagreed with the teacher and proceeded to criticize me for doing what she had directed me to do.

- ✓ Demanded that I share the content of my conversation with her that I had with the Union Representative stating: "You cover my back and I'll cover yours."
- ✓ Released faculty social security numbers. As reported in the news.

Distraught as my work environment deteriorated. I felt I had no choice but to seek the assistance of Superintendent Hughes. I emailed the Superintendent numerous times detailing information about the Principal's actions towards me and my concerns. The Superintendent and I met at least 3 times in her office to discuss ways to resolve the issues.

All my interactions and communications with the Superintendent were positive and sincere. Superintendent Hughes made me feel safe. I believed our communications to be valuable, upfront, accurate and fair-minded. We discussed options so that I would be able to emotionally and physically survive the ongoing targeting and bullying. Superintendent Hughes suggested that I might consider an "administrative transfer". On August 2006, I received an email from the Superintendent stating "Good News" offering me a position at Prince Tech. To follow-up on September 5, 2006, I received from Superintendent Hughes a letter stating: "This is to advise you of your "administrative transfer" as a Guidance Coordinator from Vinal to Prince Tech "There are no changes to my salary, and benefits as a result of this transfer." I believed by acceptance of this letter that my career and life would be safe and free from ongoing bullying, threats and a hostile work environment.

Friday October 10, 2007, I received a letter stating: "This is to advise you of your "administrative transfer" from Prince to Cheney Tech "There are no changes to my salary, and benefits as a result of this transfer." No one ever discussed this move with me. I sent an email asking the Superintendent where would I be when the employee returns. Superintendent Hughes answered I would return to Prince.

That was not the case - on November 14, 2007, I received a letter stating: "This is to advise you ***that the Durational Guidance Coordinator position you currently hold will be eliminated at the end of the 2007/2008 school year.***" And that I should make sure that my application was on file to **apply** for positions that interested me.

At this point I was devastated that the bullying, threats and hostile work environment had returned to once again threaten my career and life. All the Superintendent's assurances telling me not to worry were meaningless!

After three years of open communications with the Superintendent, I wrote to her to reaffirm whatever was going on. NO Response.

At the end of the school year 2007-2008, I was terminated as a "**Durational**" employee with no due process and no cause.

I was confused by the magnitude of the issues. I followed the directions in her letter and submitted my application packet. I presented myself at interview after interview in the Technical High School System. The only result that I received was Rejection Letters. [Individuals were employed with no experience and from outside the CTHHS]

I never received a letter from anyone in the Department of Education stating that my **PERMANENT STATUS** had changed to **DURATIONAL**. The Union contacted the Superintendent and Human Resources and their only response was that I was a **DURATIONAL EMPLOYEE** who had NO Rights to Anything.

A grievance was filed, heard and denied September/October 2008.

I trusted and believed that Superintendent Hughes "administrative transfer" was the resolution to the bullying. I felt that I had been led down a path of support but what I was really led down was a path to destruction. The Superintendent's actions and behaviors were a misuse of her position's authority and a direct harassing and bullying of me.

I was manipulated into believing her false promises that she was going to make everything better and that I would be at Prince after Cheney. I never thought that anyone could be so cruel, ruthless and take actions that could debilitate and destroy my life.

Being a counselor is who I am - not just a job.

I deal with ongoing issues that effect me both emotionally and physically. I feel suspect and have difficulty trusting anyone since this has occurred. I have sought out legal advice.

I believe the actions taken by the aforementioned were a total abuse of power with no one monitoring it and taking heed of what was going on. I support and offer my experience to show why such a bill is needed so that this type of incident does not happen to anyone else.

It is uncomfortable for me to reveal to you my story because there is no telling what kind of retaliation or vindictiveness might be aimed at me due to my frankness. But I firmly believe that someone has to speak out so that Violence and Bullying in the Workplace will be stopped!